

## Topic Page: [Painting](#)

Definition: **painting** from *The Macmillan Encyclopedia*

In art, the creation of an aesthetic entity by the skilled covering of a surface with paint. Suitable painting surfaces include paper, canvas, walls, and ivory, and among the many techniques of painting are oil, watercolour, tempera, encaustic, fresco, and, the most modern method, acrylic painting. The main subjects of painting were religious until the Renaissance period, when portraits, landscapes, genre, and still-life began to assume an independent existence. The principal painting styles in art have been classical (ancient Greek and Roman), Byzantine, romanesque, gothic, Renaissance, mannerist, baroque, rococo, neoclassical, realist, impressionist, expressionist, and abstract.

Summary Article: **painting**  
from *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

direct application of pigment to a surface to produce by tones of color or of light and dark some representation or decorative arrangement of natural or imagined forms.

See also articles on individual painters, e.g., Rubens; countries, e.g., Dutch art; periods, e.g., Renaissance art and architecture; techniques, e.g., encaustic.

### **Materials and Techniques**

Painters use a number of materials to produce the effects they desire. These include the materials of the surface, or ground; the pigments employed; the binder, or medium, in which the color is mixed; and its diluting agent. Among the various media used by artists are fresco, watercolor, oil, distemper, gouache, tempera, and encaustic. In addition to these, painting properly embraces many other techniques ordinarily associated with drawing, a term that is often used to refer to the linear aspects of the same art.

If painting and drawing are not always clearly distinguishable from each other, both are to be distinguished from the print (or work of graphic art), in which the design is not produced directly but is transferred from another surface to that which it decorates. While the print may be one of many identical works, the painting or drawing is always unique. Painting has been freely combined with many other arts, including sculpture, architecture, and, in the modern era, photography.

### **History**

In ancient Greece and medieval Europe most buildings and sculptures were painted; nearly all of the ancient decoration has been lost, but some works from Egypt have preserved their coloring and give us an insight into the importance such an art can assume. The art of painting in China was linked from the 1st cent. A.D. with the development of the Buddhist faith. Early Christian and then Byzantine artists established iconographic and stylistic prototypes in wall painting and manuscript illumination that remained the basis for Christian art (see iconography).

Highly spiritualized in concept, the medieval painting tradition gave way to a more worldly orientation with the development of Renaissance art. The murals of Giotto became a vehicle for the expression of new and living ideas and sentiments. At the height of the Renaissance a large proportion of the works were decorations of walls and altarpieces, which were necessarily conceived in terms of their part in a

larger decorative whole and their appeal for a large public. The greatest masterpieces of Raphael and Michelangelo and of the Florentine masters are generally public works of this character. The same period also saw the rise of the separate easel painting and the first use of oil on canvas. Simultaneously are found the beginnings of genre and other secular themes and the elaboration of portraiture.

Basing their art on the technical contributions of the Renaissance, e.g., the study of perspective and anatomy, the baroque masters added a virtuosity of execution and a style of unparalleled drama. From the age of the rococo, painting tended in the direction of greater intimacy. It is noteworthy, for example, that many of the masterpieces of the 19th cent., and particularly of impressionism, are small easel paintings suitable for the private home. The same period saw the rise of the large public gallery with both temporary and permanent exhibitions, an institution greatly expanded in the 20th cent.

A reawakened interest in mural painting and the contributions of painting to such arts as the motion picture and video have led some to believe that a return to a greater emphasis on the public functions of the art is taking place. Such a view can find support in the notable influence of abstract painting in the fields of industrial and architectural design. This art also continues to enjoy undiminished popularity in the home and gallery. Painting has had a long and glorious world history as an independent art. From Giotto to Picasso and from Ma Yüan to Hokusai, painting has never ceased to produce great exponents who have expressed not merely the taste but the aspirations, the concepts of space, form, and color, and the philosophy of their respective periods.

## Bibliography

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